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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 007937

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [ECON](#) [PTER](#) [EG](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: HELPING REBUILD EGYPTIAN-IRAQI POLITICAL RELATIONS

REF: CAIRO 07725

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) In recent discussions with the Ambassador, senior GOE and GOI interlocutors have expressed a willingness to engage more robustly and productively with their Iraqi counterparts in a number of specific areas. Post strongly endorses taking prompt advantage of this opening to help repair fractured GOE-GOI political relations, badly shaken as a result of the kidnapping and murder of Egypt's Ambassador to Baghdad earlier this year. These initiatives include inviting Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowafaq al Rubaie to meet with Egyptian Intelligence Chief Soliman, Iraqi Interior Minister Jabr to meet his GOE counterpart, and articulate Iraqi religious figures to meet with Egyptian religious leaders. The primary goals of such exchanges would be to prime the pump for further constructive dialogue with Egyptian and Arab League interlocutors -- admittedly influential among Iraq's Sunni community. A robust public diplomacy component must also be encapsulated in such visits, in order to begin chipping away at the prejudices and latent hostilities among Egyptian opinion shapers toward Iraq and especially Iraqi Shia. End summary.

Bridging Egypt-Iraq Differences

12. (C) To assist in making our Arab outreach strategy a success (reftel), we need to help Egypt and Iraq (as well as the Arab League and Iraq) bridge their significant differences and overcome respective prejudices and hostilities. In separate meetings with us here in Cairo, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Hamid Bayati, Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Soliman, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, and Egyptian Interior Minister Al-Adly all shared their interest in patching-up relations and their willingness to engage more actively. Nevertheless, both sides are reluctant to take the appropriate first steps. Our role should be that of facilitator, working with our British and other Coalition partners to get the momentum started.

Training: Egypt Still Willing

13. (C) The Foreign Minister and other senior GOE officials told visiting Iraq Policy Coordinator Jeffrey October 1-2 that Egypt remained prepared to train Iraqis in any field, including military training - but only in Egypt. So far, the GOE has trained 146 Iraqi soldiers, two dozen diplomats, a handful of judges, and other civil servants. Egyptian Minister of Interior Adly told Ambassador Jeffrey that he would welcome a visit by his Iraqi counterpart to further explore security training issues. Minister of Defense Tantawi also told us that Egypt wanted to do the military training for Iraqis and would cover "all the costs" involved in this effort.

Iraqi National Security Advisor Visit

14. (C) During the October 1-2 visit of Ambassador Jeffrey, we were told by Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Soliman that he would be willing to host Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowafaq al Rubaie in Cairo to discuss Iraq's security challenges and related regional issues. This would be our top priority, as al Rubaie is viewed by the GOE as less controversial than other Iraqi officials and since intelligence cooperation between Egypt and Iraq remains ongoing. Soliman is also crucial to GOE policy toward Iraq and other key regional hot spots. Also, it would be useful to facilitate more Egyptian contacts with Shia Iraqi leaders. We would be prepared to press Soliman to host this visit as soon as possible should the GOI be amenable.

Iraqi Interior Minister Visit

15. (C) Should the military training proposal gain speed, we assume that Iraqi interior minister Baqir Jabr would be critical to this effort, as would Iraqi Defense Ministry counterparts and CENTCOM personnel. While we understand that Jabr has much to keep him busy with inside Iraq, and that training outside Iraq is perhaps a sensitive subject domestically, a visit to Cairo shortly after the October 15 referendum would be timely in order to brief the Egyptians on the security situation, and to further explore the training issue.

Public Diplomacy Critical to Outreach to Arabs

16. (C) Another important component of a Jabr visit would be to pursue our interest in establishing better, and more frequent, interactions between Egyptians and Iraq's Shia community. As happened over time with Iraq's Kurds (who now have much closer relations with Egyptians), the aim would be to tear down distrust and prejudice toward Iraq's Shia population. The general, albeit mistaken, Egyptian viewpoint toward Iraq's Shia is that they are simply a tool of Tehran. We need to help the Iraqis to highlight as publicly and as articulately as possible that the vast majority of Iraq's Shia are Arab, nationalist, and not predisposed to doing Iran's bidding. The Egyptians need to hear this loudly and clearly, before they and their Arab neighbors succeed in pushing Iraq's Shia closer to Iran. Egypt and the Arab League also need to express clearly to the Iraqis their rejection of Zargawi and Al Qaida's call to attack Shias. This is something we can help set up here in Cairo, but the Iraqis will have to come prepared with these objectives in mind.

Inter-Faith Iraqi Delegation to Cairo

17. (C) Egyptian officials reflect their public's tremendous prejudice toward Shia Islam in general and toward Iraq's Shias in particular. These views have long been stoked by the Sunni orthodox bastion Al Azhar, but also by Cairo's tortuous relations with Iran. While the challenge is formidable, we hope to encourage a dialogue between prominent Egyptian religious figures and credible, articulate Iraqi counterparts, especially Shias. A visit by Interior Minister Jabr or others could offer the opportunity for a publicized meeting with the Sheikh of Al Azhar Tantawi and other notables such as the Grand Mufti. When we saw Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari here in Cairo for an Arab League ministerial last month, he expressed enthusiasm for this idea, mentioning that a similar and fruitful dialogue had taken place between Al Azhar and Iraqi Shia leaders from Najaf during the 1950's.

18. (C) Another idea along these same lines would be to prompt a visit to Cairo by a delegation of Iraqi religious figures comprised of Shia, Sunni, Christian, and Kurdish (and/or others), to meet with the leaders of Al Azhar, the Shia community, the Grand Mufti, and Pope Shenouda of the Coptic Church. Such an event would attract considerable media attention, we believe, and should be geared toward facilitating additional exchanges and dialogue between the respective groups. Again, a key focus would be to de-bunk the prevalent anti-Shia prejudice so rife here.

Ambassadors, Reciprocal Diplomatic Representation

19. (C) We have spent a lot of energy trying to sort out whose court the respective ball is in with respect to the question of Iraq's Ambassador to Cairo. Ambassador Jeffrey was told that Egypt had no problem with accepting an Iraqi nominee. But, unspoken at the time was Egypt's apparent disdain for the prospective nominee - Ms. Safia al-Soheil - who we continue to hear from Zebari, Bayati, and others is unacceptable to the GOE for less-than-certain reasons. We also heard through Iraqi contacts locally that Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit told Zebari in Jeddah October 2 that al Soheil was "unacceptable" to the GOE and that the Iraqis should put forward another name. In September, Zebari speculated to us that the Egyptians feared she would be "too outspoken" and "might embarrass them." Zebari indicated at that time that he was considering other potential candidates. We do not see Egypt changing its mind on Soheil, despite her numerous strengths and accolades. We also don't believe Egypt is prepared to send another Ambassador (or even its diplomats) to Baghdad before the December elections.

Arab League Engagement

10. (C) Despite an armed attack October 10 on an Arab League delegation convoy in Baghdad, the Arab League remains committed to engaging on Iraq in various ways (reftel).

Secretary General Moussa plans to visit Baghdad in

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mid-to-late October (possibly October 20-21) to address political reconciliation and establishing an AL representative office there. He has indicated a willingness to support Sunni political participation and support for the constitution, once changes to the draft constitution are made on a number of sensitive issues.

11. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Baghdad.

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